

**PUBLIC HEARING - RECEIVE COMMENTS ON SKATEBOARDING AS IT RELATES TO PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE PROPERTY**

Mayor Kluttz convened a public hearing, after due notice and advertisement thereof, to receive comments on skateboarding as it relates to public safety and the security of public and private property.

Ms. Melinda McHone, 7575 Bringle Ferry Road, stated that she is a mother of a skateboarder and co-owner of Skate City Skate Shop. She noted that the average age of a skateboarder is between 10-14 years of age, and reviewed the amount of time they spend practicing and skating each month. She commented that the children are getting exercise and are dedicated to their sport, adding that in a nation of obese children these children are doing what adults want them to do by being active. Ms. McHone stated that the children are not doing drugs or robbing people but are practicing their sport. She stated that they do not have a place to go to practice so they use the downtown area. Ms. McHone noted that skateboarding is a growing sport and indicated that in 2002 there were an estimated sixteen (16) million skateboarders in the United States. She commented that the skateboarders are coming downtown from other communities and they are spending tax dollars downtown. She asked Council to look at the skateboarders as athletes and consumers and challenged the community to be a part of a solution to find a place where the skaters can go.

Ms. Theresa Laib, 5175 Long Ferry Road, noted that she is a mother of a skateboarder and stated that telling the kids 'no' is not effective and the town has supported many other team sports. Ms. Laib commented that not everyone has an interest in organized group sports. She stated that schools have provided opportunities for children to succeed academically but have taken away recreation, which is part of becoming a well-rounded human being. She asked Council to put together a group to help provide resources for these kids to get what they need.

Mr. Alex Kinder, 735 Hallmark Estates Drive, stated that he did not think skateboarding should be banned because it is a hobby that he does for fun. He commented that at least the skateboarders are not on the street selling or doing drugs. Mr. Kinder stated that the available skateparks are not very good and charge too much to use.

Mr. Bill Safrit, 207 Gallery Place, indicated that he is the property board chairman for St. John's Lutheran Church. He stated that the skateboarders have a terrific talent and he feels it is a good sport and a good way for children to get outside. He noted that St. John's Lutheran Church has sandstone steps which have been damaged by skateboarders. He added that he feels there should be a place for the skateboarders but would prefer they not be on church property.

Mr. David Thompson, 434 South Fulton Street, told Council that he has not watched television or been on the computer as much since he started skateboarding. He commented that if he did not start skateboarding his life could have been different and asked Council not to ban skateboarding.

Mr. Rick Morgan, 7575 Bringle Ferry Road, stated that he is the co-owner of Skate City Skate Shop and he agrees with what has been said. He noted that he understands the problems with damage to property and feels a person should respect other people's property. He stated that the kids need a place to practice their sport and there are no good facilities in the County, adding that the City needs to look into building a place for the kids to skate. He noted the municipal parks in Asheville and Wilmington and stated it would behoove the City to look into something similar. Mr. Morgan then presented Council with a petition concerning an interest for a skatepark facility.

Mayor Kluttz noted that several e-mails were received concerning this issue and read them into the record. E-mails were received from:

Mr. Mike Fuller, Innes Street Drug, stated that as a business owner in downtown Salisbury he does not support skateboarding in the downtown area. He stated that he felt skateboarding should not be allowed from Jackson Street to Lee Street and from Kerr Street to Horah Street. He cited the danger for pedestrian traffic and noted that many of his customers were elderly. Mr. Fuller stated that he did not feel it is the responsibility of City Council to provide a safe skateboarding location for the youth but would support a public/private partnership.

Mr. Gray Stout, Stout Studio, stated that his son and his son's friends skateboard and he is proud that Salisbury has a clean and safe downtown where he can feel comfortable with the boys skateboarding without fear of being hurt. He indicated that the idea of a City skatepark should be investigated and offered to assist, pro bono, to develop a site plan and design.

Mr. Ralph Baker, Sr., Ralph Baker Shoes, asked Council to give this issue careful consideration before a youngster runs into an elderly person and causes them injury. He stated that he feels there is a time and place for everything but he feels the merchants do not need to scare away customers because the sidewalks are not safe.

Ms. Pam Hylton Coffield, The Stitchin' Post, stated that she and her employees are opposed to allowing skateboarding in the downtown area. She stated that the skating is loud, fast, and dangerous to anyone walking or standing on the sidewalks. She noted the damage that has been done to property and asked Council to end this dangerous sport in the downtown area.

Mr. Lane Yates, Yates Development, stated that he has had damage from skateboards at several of his properties. He indicated that there should be plenty of places to skateboard other than decorative garden walls, granite bases, and in front of stores and sidewalks downtown.

Mr. Bruce Wilson, Fine Frame Gallery, indicated that he did not mind young riders using the sidewalks. He suggested inviting the young people to meet with the City's urban planners to see if a low cost railing could be placed in Robertson Park. He urged Council to make the riders part of the solution and not the problem.

Mr. Jay Whittington, Central Carolina Insurance, expressed concern over skateboarders on First Presbyterian Church property. He noted damage that has been done and asked Council to monitor this problem closely. He asked Council to consider a skateboard park to give young people a place to gather and play.

Ms. Becky Lowery, First Presbyterian Church, explained the problems the church has encountered trying to deal with skateboarders on their property. She concluded that Salisbury needs an ordinance against skateboard and rollerblade use on private property, city streets, sidewalks, and public buildings.

Mr. Rick Morgan, 7575 Bringle Ferry Road, noted that there are laws against vandalism and trespassing and he felt instead of adding more laws, the laws that are in place should be enforced.

Ms. Ruth Meade, 157 Lilly Avenue and First Presbyterian Church, indicated that she envies the abilities of the skateboarders and that they do not want the skateboarders to stop skating but to stop destroying the property. She noted that their attitude seems to be that the church asking them to stop is a big joke and that part of skateboarding is doing what you are not supposed to do. Ms. Meade stated that the City needed to seriously look at a place for skateboarders.

Ms. Theresa Laib, 5175 Long Ferry Road, stated that she has an issue with restriction of the children's ability to transport themselves from one area to another. She noted that this is a mode of transportation for them and to state that they can not come to town with their skateboards affects their civil liberties.

There being no one else to speak **for** or **against** this issue, Mayor Kluttz closed the public hearing.

Councilman Burgin stated that Council understands that not all kids who skateboard are bad, but Council is faced with dealing with the ones who are and Council's options are limited. He stated that he feels there are places in the City where things are not compatible, adding that he did not know what could be done in a moderate way to solve the problem. Mr. Burgin noted that, to date, the ability of the skateboarders to respect others and operate within reasonable limits has not happened. He stated that he could support developing an overlay that defines an area where skateboarders would have to carry their boards to walk through, adding that he would be willing to sit down and explore the possibilities but he did not think the City had the resources to provide a public place. Mr. Burgin stated that if skaters can not set limits that are reasonable he feels

Council will have to do it for them. He noted that in the downtown area there are too many conflicts for skateboarders to have free reign.

Councilman Kennedy stated that he understands the problems of the church and the places the skateboarders should not be, but he also felt there is a need for a place for them to be. He noted that there are limited resources and suggested a Council Committee to meet with others who may have resources to solve this problem.

Mayor Pro Tem Woodson stated that passing a law against skateboarders would create more for the Police to keep up with. He noted that something has to be done and it seems there needs to be somewhere for the kids to go. He stated that he feels it is fair that the property owners do not want their property damaged but he can not support banning skateboarding today.

Councilman Lewis indicated that looking into a skateboard park will take a political sponsor but he does not think that a park will change what is happening downtown.

Mayor Kluttz commented that Council's first priority is safety for citizens and noted that Salisbury does not have a modern downtown and this is adding to a dangerous situation. She noted that she would like to see an area that could be designated for skating, although resources are limited. She asked if Council would like to form a Committee or send to staff to help find a solution.

City Manager David Treme informed Council that he has contacted the University of North Carolina School of Government for assistance from a graduate student to work with the City on this issue. He noted that he would like the opportunity to gather information and at some point possibly conduct a workshop to develop creative solutions. Mr. Treme encouraged those in attendance who had an interest in this issue to sign the sheets located in the foyer so they can be included.

Mayor Kluttz asked if Council preferred for staff to proceed and report back to Council or appoint a Council Committee. Council agreed for staff to study and bring a recommendation back to Council.